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SECONDARY EDUCATION IN VICTORIA

THE question of defining the limits of elementary and secondary education is always one of extreme difficulty. In Victoria, owing to the absence of any systematic control of schools, other than state schools, which are all primary, this difficulty amounts almost to an impossibility. Most of the primary instruction is carried on by the state. The statesmen of the early days of Victoria were men of large and liberal views. They had a firm and clear grasp of the question of education. They knew that universal education was a necessary complement to universal suffrage, and that an uneducated democracy could not possibly exist. Hence, after long and careful deliberation, an act was passed in 1872 which provided for free, secular, and compulsory education. In carrying out the provisions of this act, schools which are known as state schools have been established in every town and village, and at the close of the year 1899 there were 1889 state schools in operation. Attendance at a state school is not compulsory, but parents must give evidence that their children between the ages of six and thirteen years are being satisfactorily educated somewhere. The state school instruction is wholly free, all the expense being borne by the state. As many parents prefer to have their children educated according to their own views and in schools where they think more individual attention is given

to the pupils than can possibly be given to them in a state school, there exist side by side with the state schools a large number of private schools. In the year 1899, the latest year for which statistics are obtainable, there were 901 such private schools in operation. These statistics are obtained from returns furnished by the principals of private schools in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act of 1872. At these schools there were altogether 52,318 pupils in attendance. This number is about one fifth of the whole number of children under instruction in Victoria—the total number being 255,582. In our state schools there is a definite program of instruction. The teachers' salaries are partly dependent on the results obtained by their pupils at the annual inspectorial examinations held on the work prescribed by the program. Throughout the 901 private schools, however, there is no standard of work prescribed. The public has no means of judging of their relative merit or lack of merit. No form of inspection exists, nor is any qualification required of any teacher engaged therein. Though the private schools are thus exempt from the evil effects of having their methods of instruction forced into one uniform mold, nevertheless they suffer from the pernicious results that spring from an utter absence of control and organization. The consequence is that most of these private schools find it necessary to their existence to claim, whether rightly or not, that they do a class of work superior to that done in the state schools. They must either do this or be content to be ranked as infant schools. A great proportion, therefore, of these 901 private schools claim the title of secondary schools.

The amount of money expended in the year 1899 by the state on education was, neglecting the shillings and pence, £713,777. Of this amount primary education absorbed £674,-787. The subsidy to the Melbourne University was £13,250 whilst the schools of mines and other technical schools received grants amounting to £24,740. It may thus be seen that our government expends annually on primary and tertiary education—if I may be allowed the use of the term—the sum of £727,-027, whilst of late years it has provided no connecting link

whatever between these stages. Prior to 1893 an attempt was made to bridge this gap by a system of scholarships, which enabled a few of the cleverer boys and girls to spend two or three years at one of the leading secondary schools, and so qualify for admission to the university. But since the year 1893 owing to the necessity for national retrenchment, even this slight attempt to connect the primary state instruction with a university education has been neglected. The abolition of this system of scholarships was a retrograde step in our educational world, but it was only one of the many severe blows received during our years of depression by the education department. It is gratifying to know that the need for retrenchment has passed, and that not only has there been a rapid restoration of all previous educational advantages enjoyed by the community but there are also many signs of real progress in the field of technical and manual instruction.

Amongst the 901 private schools referred to above, there are many that do very superior work, and it is amongst them that our genuine secondary schools are to be found. The standard generally aimed at is that prescribed by the Melbourne University for the matriculation or entrance examination. This examination is of a twofold nature. There is what is known as a pass and honours standard in most of the subjects prescribed for the examination. It thus provides practically a senior and a junior standard. The pass examination serves, too, a double purpose. It is regarded as a school's exit examination as well as a university entrance examination. The honours examination is attended by comparatively few candidates. But members of the professorial board of the university are now lending great assistance to the superior class of schools by continually insisting in their various reports that students who intend taking up a university course should remain at secondary schools till they attain the honours standard prescribed for the matriculation examination. The few schools which maintain a staff capable of teaching up to the honours standard are of late years beginning to find that the number of students of this class is rapidly increasing. The bulk, however, of the candidates for the matriculation examination

rest satisfied with the pass standard, as in addition to its being the minimum entrance examination to the university it is also accepted as a fairly good certificate for junior clerks by various corporate institutions. For the examination there are about 1600 candidates annually and of these about 42 per cent. pass. The examination is wide in range. Till recently so much latitude was allowed to candidates in the choice of subjects that it has been found necessary to impose some restrictions in this respect. The following is a brief statement of the subjects for examination :

Latin.—Translation into English of easy passages from books not prescribed. Translation into Latin prose of easy passages of English. Accidence and syntax. One book of Virgil's *Aeneid* and one book of Caesar, or their equivalent. For the *honours* examination, in addition to the *pass* work one book of Livy and one book of Horace's *Odes*, or their equivalent.

2. *Greek*.—A similar standard to that prescribed for Latin.

3. *Algebra*.—Pass: Up to and including quadratic equations. Honours: Up to and including the binomial theorem.

4. *Geometry*.—Pass: Euclid, Books I—III, with easy deductions. Honours: Euclid, Books I—VI, with deductions. The elementary properties of the parabola and ellipse. Trigonometry.

5. *English*.—Composition, grammar, literature.

6. *History*.—England, Rome, Greece.

7. *French*.—Pass: Translation into English of easy passages of French. Translation into French prose of easy passages of English. Accidence and leading rules of syntax. Honours: A more advanced examination. The history of the derivation of the language from Latin.

8. *German*.—A similar standard to that prescribed for French.

9. *Arithmetic*.—General (no honours paper in this subject).

10. *Geography*.—Physical and general (no honours paper in this subject).

11. *Chemistry*.

12. *Physics*.—Pass: Dynamics and heat. Honours: Dynamics, heat, magnetism and electricity.

13. *Elementary Anatomy and Physiology*.

14. *Botany*.

15. *Music*.

16. *Drawing*.

To obtain a pass a candidate must now pass in two languages, one mathematical subject, and must, at the same time, pass in at least six subjects. No candidate is, however, allowed to include more than two science subjects in the six necessary for a pass.

Now this matriculation examination is decried by many as the bane of our secondary schools. They assert that it is made the be-all and end-all of secondary-school work. But this is rather a narrow judgment. Certainly the puffing advertisements that appear at the beginning of each school year in the metropolitan newspapers do lend some weight to such a statement. Most of these advertisements recount the number of passes gained at the matriculation examination by the pupils during the preceding year. But if the number of passes obtained by a school is at all large and fairly regular in successive years, it proves that good work is being done in that school. For the examination is the only one conducted by an outside independent examining board, and it is of so wide a scope and of so liberal a nature that it exercises no cramping influence on a teacher's work. It provides for classical, mathematical, scientific, and artistic subjects. Little more save a purely commercial set of subjects could be included. But the evil that does exist in connection with the examination is that almost every one of the 901 private schools attempts to obtain at least one pass at matriculation during some period of its history. Sometimes it is a member of the school staff that succeeds in passing; and the school is duly advertised as one that prepares pupils successfully for the matriculation examination, and claims to rank as a secondary school. But this pernicious practice is bound to continue so long as there is no inspection of schools and no qualification demanded from those who engage in teaching outside the state schools. It is the only means of living left to the inefficient, and the public are temporarily duped as regards the quality of instruction imparted in a school. In spite, however, of what I have written about the evils that exist amongst these private schools, it must be conceded that there are some brilliant exceptions.

Five of the schools included in the 901 private schools in the government report are generally allowed the title of the "Great Public Schools of Victoria." These at the date of their establishment received sums of money amounting to £40,000 in all, and grants of land from the government for the erection of

school buildings. But they have received no state assistance since their foundation. These schools are the Scotch College, Wesley College, Church of England grammar schools (2), St. Patrick's College. They receive male pupils only and each is attached to a religious denomination. In connection with some of them there are exhibitions chiefly with the view of assisting the ablest scholars to complete their education at the university. It is in these schools that most of the boys who receive a higher education are taught. Of more recent date was the foundation of colleges for the education of girls. The two leading girls' secondary schools are the Presbyterian Ladies' College and the Methodist Ladies' College. Although these colleges are attached to religious denominations, no religious test prevails as regards the admission of pupils. They all receive pupils of any denomination. There are many other schools of a preparatory nature in which excellent work is being done, and scattered throughout Victoria in every important town there is to be found a convent school in which the higher branches of education are successfully carried on.

But in four fifths of these 901 private schools even the elementary instruction that is offered is wretchedly poor. And obstinate questionings have forced themselves on the minds of educationists as to whether provision should not be made for the proper training and the registration of teachers for secondary schools. It is hoped that thereby the instruction given as well as the status of the teachers employed will be improved. A movement has been carried on spasmodically for the past ten or twelve years to secure the registration of teachers engaged in secondary schools. But it is only during the past year that any hopeful signs of its being carried into effect have become apparent. The public had to be educated. More attention is being given to educational problems. The press has taken up the subject and now advocates the registration of teachers employed in schools outside the state schools. A select committee of the university senate has drafted proposals to secure this object. The senate has adopted these proposals, and they have also been approved at a meeting of teachers called for the purpose

of considering them. The university senate has further passed a resolution affirming the desirability of incorporating in the course for the B.A. degree the theory of teaching as a subject. It is with pleasure, too, that one notes that the executive body of the university—the university council—in its list of requirements recently presented to the state treasurer has asked for a sufficient increase in the government subsidy to allow of the establishment of a chair of pedagogy. The select committee of the senate appointed to consider the proposal to register secondary-school teachers was appointed on my motion, and I had the honour of being a member of it. Our greatest difficulty was the definition of a secondary school. Finding it impossible to distinguish satisfactorily between primary and secondary schools, we made our resolutions applicable to all schools other than state schools. The resolutions provide for the establishment of an educational council to carry out the provisions of the legislation which we hope to secure during the next session of our state parliament. The principal or proprietor of each school shall decide as to whether he shall conduct a primary or a secondary school. The minimum qualifications for teachers in each class of school are set forth, and in accordance with the proposed act the educational council shall publish a register of duly qualified teachers. All vested rights are to be conserved. Legislation on these lines may be regarded as a small concession to secondary-school teachers. But it is the first forward step that has been attempted, and there can be no doubt that once it has been taken, progress will become rapid. I do not think that the public will rest satisfied until there is also some form of inspection of secondary schools carried out by an independent body. In a small community the difficulty would be to find a capable body of inspectors—men of wide erudition and of practical knowledge of the limitations and possibilities of teaching.

The technical schools and the schools of mines and of agriculture are almost wholly under the state control. The fees charged to the students are small, the schools relying on government subsidies to make up any deficiencies. For the past eighteen months a royal commission on technical education has

been sitting. Four progress reports have been issued by this commission. In the last progress report issued a recommendation was made for the establishment of a general educational council. This recommendation appears to be a wise one, and is of vital importance to secondary education. The duties of such a council are very clearly set forth in the words of the report, which I cannot do better than quote.

What is wanted is a body that will watch over the work of every branch of the educational system and see that the work of the respective parts is properly apportioned and duly carried out, that efficient means are afforded for the acquisition of the knowledge requisite in every walk of life, that the agencies for the supply of teachers, duly qualified, are in good working order, and that the whole is permanently alive to all legitimate movements of reform. . . . It is essential that the various schools should be encouraged to preserve variety, spontaneity, and originality of method, which are essentials in education. Can the government departments of education and agriculture do this? In our judgment they are powerless to do so.

The constitution of a general council of education should not be difficult to determine; and it should include representatives of the university, educationists, and men who combine intelligence, culture, and a zeal for the diffusion of education, and representatives specially qualified to deal with the various departments of education relating to primary and technical education. It should include women as well as men. Secondary education should be represented. It cannot be said that the relation of secondary education to technical education has ever been discussed in Victoria. . . . Its functions should be to inquire into the working of the education department, and all the educational work of the colony, and to report to parliament annually upon all matters connected with education. . . . It would furnish parliament and the public with the means of judgment. It would, without a doubt, be welcomed by all the teachers interested in the perfection of educational methods, and would keep the community aroused to the recognition of the essential importance of national training.

The work done by this royal commission has so far been excellent, but whether it will bear any practical fruit in the immediate future is doubtful. If the wise recommendations made by it be adopted, education in all its branches will be greatly improved. And I am pleased to note that the proposal made by the university senate for the establishment of an educational council, to effect the registration of teachers in secondary schools, will harmonize with the recommendation of the royal

commission for the establishment of a general council of education. Systematic direction and organization of secondary schools is the great desideratum, and if this were attained I think that secondary education in our state would be placed on a sound basis.

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